

Health and social care

The UK health and social care sector employs over 3 million people, of whom over 1.7 million work for the National Health Service, and the rest for public sector employers (such as local authorities), the private sector or for voluntary organisations.

The actual array of roles in the sector is vast, ranging from doctors and NHS managers, to social workers. The allied health professions alone include a huge range of roles such as art/music/drama therapists, dietitians, physiotherapists, radiographers, and speech and language therapists.

Getting in and entry points

A significant number of Oxford graduates each year study medicine as a second degree. Four-year 'fast track' medical degrees for graduates are offered at several UK universities, with some funding available. Applications for these courses are made through UCAS and close in October, and entry requirements vary: some only accept applicants with a degree in life sciences, some specify certain subjects at A-level. Most use admission tests as part of the application process. Alternatively, you could apply for a second, full degree in medicine through UCAS. These have much more limited funding and therefore tend to be less competitive.

Many of the allied health professions can be entered by undertaking a two-year postgraduate qualification. Use the course finder on the NHS Health Careers website to check entry requirements and available funding. A science degree is normally required, with some exceptions. An alternative option for scientists is the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP). Workplace-based and salaried, the



scheme trains people to become specialists in various disciplines from microbiology to medical physics. Closing dates are normally early in Hilary term.

Social workers can qualify via either an undergraduate degree or a postgraduate qualification. Frontline's graduate programme (www.thefrontline.org.uk) offers a new route into children's social work by providing a paid, work-based course in which participants simultaneously complete a master's in social work. Likewise, Think Ahead (www.wethinkahead.org) have launched a similar course in adult mental health social work.

Students wishing to train as clinical / counselling psychologists in the UK need first to obtain the Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) from the British Psychology Society (BPS). This may be done either through an undergraduate degree in psychology or through a conversion course. Relevant work experience is then required before embarking on a doctorate in clinical psychology (currently funded by the NHS), or a doctorate or qualification in counselling psychology (normally self-funded).

The sector also has graduate management training programmes, which are open to graduates of any degree subject. The NHS programme allows specialism in general



management, HR management, finance management and health informatics. Administrative roles are plentiful, and may be found alongside clinical roles at www.jobs.nhs.uk, or through many private sector websites.

Extra-curricular ideas

- Volunteer with local charities and community organisations to help the vulnerable or disadvantaged. Pastoral experience is useful for all roles in the sector. You could initially do voluntary work on a hospital ward, through student-run community groups, or through Oxfordshire volunteering organisations.
- Get involved in Oxford SU Mind Your Head campaign to promote mental health awareness.
- Become a Student Peer Supporter, a JCR Welfare Rep, or volunteer for Nightline.
- Arrange some work-shadowing in a hospital or health centre if you are thinking about graduate entry medicine.

Medicine is a really interesting career that has many possible avenues to go down – one of the most exciting things for me currently is getting to dip my toe into the various specialties during the clinical rotations. It opens the door to many opportunities...

Elizabeth Keech, Graduate Entry Medicine, University of Nottingham; BA Modern Languages (French and Russian), Lincoln College, 2020

Next steps

www.careers.ox.ac.uk/medicine-as-a-second-degree
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/psychology
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/public-health
www.careers.ox.ac.uk/social-care

Alumni profile

Natasha Devaraj

What: I am part of one of the adult mental health teams (AMHTs) in south Oxfordshire. I work alongside nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists to provide support for working-age adults in the community with severe and enduring mental health problems. I provide recovery interventions based on person-centred goals, such as improving independent living skills, guided cognitive self-help strategies, and structured behavioural exercises like exposure response prevention.

Why: My long-term career aspirations are to become a clinical psychologist. This requires at least two years of relevant experience, alongside a 2.1 undergraduate psychology degree or course conversion. The field is very competitive due to limited training spaces, so most aspiring psychologists work as support workers or healthcare assistants before moving onto advanced roles like assistant psychologists and research assistants. My role has been fantastic for understanding how AMHTs and wider mental health services function. I have also gained experience with many different mental health conditions, giving me an idea of what conditions and client groups I may want to work with in future.

Advice: If you're interested in working within mental health, it can be useful to gain experience in social care first. Learning disability charities and residential care homes provide opportunities to develop interpersonal skills, emotional resilience and experience of working with neurodevelopmental conditions, dementia and stroke rehabilitation. These are vital transferable skills and can give you great examples to discuss at interview when looking for mental health positions. I would also recommend volunteering at mental health charities as it is imperative to build your confidence in having challenging, highly emotional conversations.



Position

Support Time & Recovery Worker, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Background

BA Experimental Psychology, Lady Margaret Hall, 2023.

Alumni profile

Elizabeth Keech

What: I am currently in the clinical phase of the graduate entry medicine course at Nottingham, which I started in 2021. The course is accelerated, so is only four years compared to the usual five to six, which is great once you've made up your mind that medicine is for you and are keen to get on with it! I became interested in the course in the early years of my undergraduate degree and toyed with the idea of starting again and reapplying for the usual undergraduate route. However, I found out about the graduate version and realised that a good litmus test of my seriousness about the career would be to see if I still wanted to do it after four years of languages – and I did!

How: Coming from a non-science background was initially daunting, as I hadn't touched the sciences since A-levels and most universities require graduate entrants to sit an admissions test – either the UCAT or GAMSAT. It took a bit of time and some hard work, but it was doable, and I'm glad to have done something different beforehand since it has kept my interests broad and equipped me with a skillset I might not have had otherwise. I also had a year out between graduating from Oxford and starting in Nottingham, which gave me the chance to do some shadowing in palliative care and geriatrics, work as a domiciliary carer, and work in a COVID vaccine clinic. The beauty of the graduate course is that you can take all of your previous experiences in with you – I found my languages course really helped with learning anatomical terms and communication skills, while the carer and vaccine clinic roles helped build confidence in terms of working in a healthcare setting.

Why: Medicine is a really interesting career that has many possible avenues to go down – one of the most exciting things for me currently is getting to dip my toe into the various specialties during the clinical rotations. It opens the door to many opportunities, including travel, conferences, research, and, above all, meeting lots of people from all walks of life. It is not always an easy route to go down, but it is definitely fulfilling, which is something I was sure I wanted from my career.



Position

Graduate Entry Medicine,
University of Nottingham
(graduating 2025).

Background

BA Modern Languages (French
and Russian), Lincoln College,
2020.

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The Summer Internship Programme

www.careers.ox.ac.uk/sip

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